

# Collaboration Fact Sheet

If individual members of a community can do many things to help prevent substance abuse, groups of people—working together—can have an even greater effect.

“Collaboration is a mutually beneficial and well-defined relationship entered into by two or more organizations to achieve results they are more likely to achieve together than alone,” say two experts on collaboration.”

Community, interagency, and intra-agency collaborations are three common types. Collaborations often begin with just informal networking. Agencies may next develop cooperative agreements and share information, but not define a shared mission or structure. They may then move into a phase of coordination that includes some planning and division of roles. Ultimately, these partners may arrive at a full collaboration, which may include a shared mission statement and set of goals; interagency agreements that spell out tasks and responsibilities for each member agency; commitments of resources; and revised policies, procedures, and systems (e.g., for record-keeping) that are compatible and mutually supporting.

One study of organizations across States, each involved in at least one collaboration, identified these characteristics of an effective partnership:<sup>12</sup>

- The collaboration addresses an important need and has broad support and involvement from the community.
- Membership is inclusive (8 to 14 partners is not unusual).
- Decision-making is shared; decisions are made by the group, not by a small cadre or one person.
- Members focus on how to work well together: They are committed to taking time and building trust, and they see the collaboration as a long-term effort.
- Participants are frequently required to change the way they do things.

## Collaboration Illustration

### *Community Group Uses Nuisance Abatement Laws to Clean up the Neighborhood<sup>13</sup>*

Nuisance abatement has been part of common law since the 16th century. Members of the Butcher's Hill community of Baltimore put this common law to good use. An abandoned house in their neighborhood had become a magnet for drug use, drug sales, and other criminal activities. After notifying the owner that they would board up the property if he failed to do so, a group of residents sealed off all possible entrances to the house, using construction techniques specifically developed to keep buildings secure from trespassers. They also cleaned the yard and sealed the entrance to the property. Community residents then sued the owner for the cost of labor and materials— approximately \$350—and the District Court awarded them the full amount. The group now plans to use this technique to clean up other drug houses in their community.

This concept can be applied to any vacant property that creates a nuisance to neighbors by interfering with their right to the quiet enjoyment of their own living space. A property might reasonably be considered a nuisance if, for example, it is used for drug dealing, has become infested with insects or rodents, or otherwise presents a physical danger or health threat to neighbors.

Any neighbor of such a property, whether an individual person or group, business owner, church, or other entity in the vicinity of the nuisance, can sue the owner of the

property. Nuisance abatement law provides that as long as the neighbors provide adequate notice to the property owner, behave reasonably, and do not disturb the peace, they have the right to deal with the nuisance in an appropriate fashion if the owner does not, and then sue the owner for the cost of remedying the nuisance; the court then has the authority to order the owner to repay those costs. "Abating" the nuisance might include cleaning up the yard around the property, boarding up the building, or turning off the water.

The process an individual, group, or business should follow for this type of nuisance abatement is as follows:

1. Identify the nuisance property.
2. Gather evidence, such as: Who owns the property? What is the nuisance? Are the police aware of the problem? Has the property been raided by the police?
3. Give the owner notice and request that the nuisance be abated.
4. After a reasonable amount of time, take action to abate the nuisance.
5. Sue the owner for the cost of the action.